

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 2155

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SOPN, CZ

SUBJECT: TIMES EDITORIAL, CZECH PRESS TREATMENT OF US

REF: STATE 198204

1. WE APPRECIATE THE DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS AND WILL
BASE OURSELVES ON THEM DURING ANY FURTHER DISCUSSIONS
OF THE SUBJECT.

2. WITH REGARD TO PARA 3 REFTEL, WE OF COURSE AGREE
FULLY THAT THE TIMES EDITORIAL HAD A VALID POINT IN
CRITICIZING THE CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS FOR ITS HEAVY-HANDED
ANTI-AMERICAN PROPAGANDA. THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE THAT
WE HAVE BROUGHT THIS MATTER UP FORMALLY WITH THE GOC
ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS, NOTABLY IN PROTESTING PRESS
TREATMENT OF THE US ROLE IN THE 1945 LIBERATION OF
CZECHOSLOVAKIA (PRAGUE 917 AND PRAGUE 959) AND CONCERN-
ING AN OFFENSIVE RUDE PRAVO ARTICLE ON PUERTO RICO
(PRAGUE 1347). BEYOND THIS, HOWEVER, CHARGE HAS DURING
THE PAST YEAR ON MANY OCCASIONS BROUGHT THE SUBJECT
UP WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER, DEPUTY FOREIGN MINIS-
TERS, MFA OFFICE DIRECTORS, AND AT LOWER LEVELS,
COMPLAINING ABOUT CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS TREATMENT OF
US AFFAIRS. SINCE THIS TOPIC IS SO INTIMATELY CON-
NECTED WITH SOME OF OUR FAVORITE SUBJECTS OF DISCUS-
SIONS--FOR EXAMPLE WITH THE IMPROVEMENT OF BILATERAL
REALATIONS, OR WITH CSCE (PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS VISAS

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FOR JOURNALISTS AND THE NEED FOR MORE OPEN PRESS

COVERAGE)--IT ARISES NATURALLY, AND CHARGE HAS USED EVERY SUITABLE OCCASION TO BRING IT UP.

3. FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF REFTEL, CHARGE AND POLITICAL COUNSELOR TOOK ADVANTAGE OF CALL ON NOVOTNY (ACTING HEAD SIXTH DEPT MFA) AUG 22 ON ANOTHER SUBJECT (NOTIFICATION OF NATO MANEUVERS IN FULFILLMENT OF CSCW AGREEMENTS) TO RAISE SUBJECT OF PRESS. AFTER EXPRESSING AGAIN DISAGREEMENT WITH THRUSTS OF TIMES EDITORIAL AND MAKING FUNDAMENTAL POINTS IN REFTEL, CHARGE SAID CZECHOSLOVAKS COULD EXPECT CRITISM OF THEIR PRESS COVERAGE OF US AFFAIRS, FOR IN POINT OF FACT, AS HE HAD TOLD NOVOTNY AND OTHERS EARLIER, IT WAS PROBABLY WORST IN EE. AS SPECIFIC EXAMPLE, EMBOFFS CITED OBJECTIONABLE ARTICLE IN AUG 22 RUDE PRAVO (SEE PRAGUE 2144) ABOUT US PILOT IN RECENT BORDER HELICOPTER INCIDENT. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS SOME DISCUSSION OF SPECIFICS OF THE ARTICLE, CHARGE EMPHASIZED BASIC POINT THAT CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS WAS EXCESSIVELY AND UNFAIRLY CRITICAL OF US AND THAT THIS WAS NOTED IN WASHINGTON AND THEREFORE WAS BOUND TO AFFECT BILATERAL RELATIONS, WHICH WAS REGRETTABLE. (INCIDENTALLY, NOVOTNY MENTIONED THAT CSSR CHARGE BUZEK IN WASHINGTON HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO SEND LETTER TO TIMES REPLYING TO EDITORIAL OF AUG 12.)

4. EMBOFFS COULD NOT CITE FBIS REPORT MENTIONED IN REFTEL BECAUSE WE DO NOT YET HAVE IT IN HAND. WE WILL HOWEVER LOOK FOR SUITABLE OCCAIONS TO MENTION IT AND OTHER OBJECTIONABLE ARTICLES IN CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS, AS WE HAVE DONE IN PAST.

5. WE HAVE GIVEN SOME THOUGHT TO WHAT MIGHT BE DONE MORE EFFECTIVELY TO CHANGING TONE OF CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS. AS REFTEL IMPLIED, CRITICAL ARTICLES IN US PRESS MAY HAVE SOME IMPACT. (DEPARTMENT MAY RECALL ARTICLE BY DUSKO DODER IN WASHPOST JUNE 5, "PRAGUE PRESS ASSAILS US," WHICH WAS BASED LARGELY ON INTERVIEW WITH CHARGE AND WHICH USEFULLY MADE CONFIDENTIAL

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POINT ABOUT HOW CZECHOSLOVAKIA STOOD OUT IN ITS UNFAIR COVERAGE.) HOWEVER, WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS IS NOT MERELY BAD TOWARDS US, IT IS BAD IN GENERAL, AND THE REASON IS THAT IN POST-1968 CZECHOSLOVAKIA THE REGIME AT SOVIET BEHEST, HAS GIVEN AND CONTINUES TO GIVE FREE REIN TO THE IDEOLOGUES AND THE AGITPROP TYPES. (PRESS TREATMENT OF OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES IS ALSO EGREGIOUS, AL-

THOUGH THEY SELDOM PROTEST AS WE DO.) THE ONLY THING THAT WILL WORK, THEREFORE, IS WHAT WORKED OVER THE LONG RUN, AND IN A LIMITED WAY, IN MOSCOW: NAMELY, TO INVOLVE PRESS COVERAGE IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS IN SUCH A WAY AS TO MAKE OUR COMPLAINTS HEARD--BECAUSE THEY HAVE AN INTEREST IN LISTENING.

6. DURING TIMES OF TENSE RELATIONS, THE PARTY AUTHORITIES IN PRAGUE HAVE NO INCENTIVE TO PUT THE CLAMPS ON THE AGITPROP RASCALS; DURING THE DEBATE OVER THE LONG-GRAVEL AMENDMENT, THE FOREIGN MINISTER TOLD US IN SO MANY WORDS THAT IF HIS COUNTRY WAS TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, HE HAD NO INCENTIVE TO TRY TO IMPROVE PRESS COVERAGE ABOUT THE US. BY CONTRAST, PRESS WAS NOTABLY RESTRAINED--AT TIMES EVEN MILDLY FAVORABLE--DURING PERIOD BETWEEN INITIALLING OF CLAIMS AGREEMENT AND INTRODUCTION OF LONG-GRAVEL. NOW THAT THE WORSE SHOCK OF LONG-GRAVEL IS OVER, HOWEVER, AND THE CZECHOSLOVAKS ARE TALKING AGAIN ABOUT "SPIRALING UPWARDS" IN OUR RELATIONS, WE BELIEVE THE PROPITIOUS MOMENT MAY COME FOR SOME REALLY EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION TO AFFECT THE TONE OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS TOWARDS US. THREE PARTICULAR OCCASIONS ARE AT HAND: DURING THE PROJECTED VISIT OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARTMAN AND AS THE NEW CZECHOSLOVAK AND AMERICAN AMBASSADORS TAKE UP THEIR DUTIES. IF WE MAKE OUR DIPLEASURE KNOWN AT HIGH LEVELS, STRESSING THE POINT THAT BETTER PRESS HELPS MAKE BETTER RELATIONS, WE BELIEVE THERE WILL BE SOME CHANCE OF IMPROVING THE SITUATION.

7. LOOKING TO THESE POSSIBLE HIGH-LEVEL DISCUSSIONS, WE BELIEVE WE SHOULD HAVE OUR AMMUNITION WELL PRE-
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PARED. IF WE MERELY SAY WE ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THEIR TREATMENT OF US, WE WILL GIVE THE FOREIGN MINISTRY LITTLE LEVERAGE AGAINST THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PRESS DEPARTMENT. THE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT THE APPROPRIATE AGENCY(PRESUMABLY INR, CIA, AND/OR FBIS) BE ASKED TO ANALYZE THE RECENT CZECHO-

SLOVAK PRESS AND PREPARE A STUDY, WITH EXAMPLES, WHICH COULD PROVIDE A BASIS FOR EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION WITH GOC AUTHORITIES. (THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE OTHER EE COUNTRIES ALSO, TO ENABLE US TO MAKE COMPARISONS ABOUT RELATIVE HARSHNESS OF CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS.) IF WE WORK HARD ENOUGH AT THE JOB, GIVEN A CONTEXT OF SLIGHTLY IMPROVING RELATIONS, WE BELIEVE IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO AFFECT IN SOME

MEASURE THE WAY WE ARE TREATED IN THE CZECHOSLOVAK
PRESS.
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